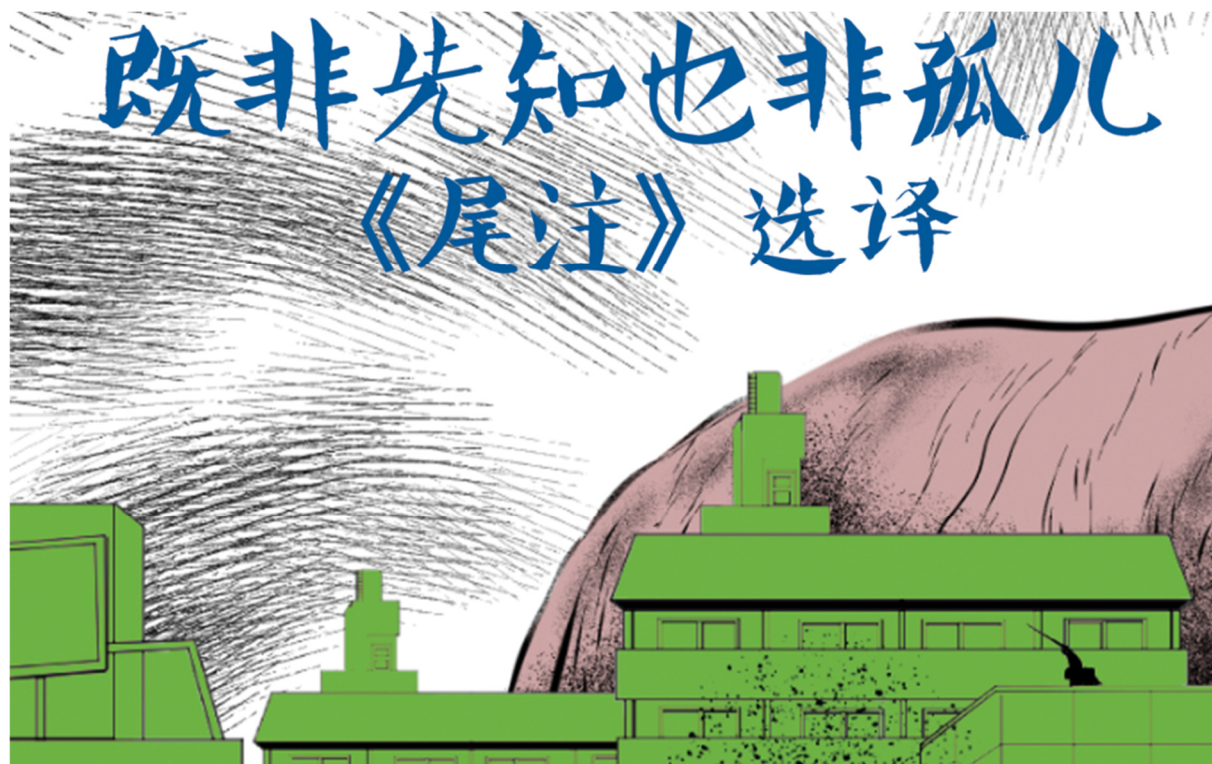


## Neither Prophets nor Orphans: An Interview with Endnotes

by [chuang](#) | Feb 22, 2025 | [Blog](#) | [0 comments](#)



From 2018 to 2024, comrades translated a series of articles from the international communist journal *Endnotes* into Chinese, publishing them on mainland websites such as *The Paper* (澎湃) and organizing events with the authors. Last year we revised those translations (nine articles in total) and compiled them into a three-volume book, adding an extensive glossary and, for the introduction, conducting an interview with two members of Endnotes about the group's history. What follows is a polished transcription of the interview, which will be published simultaneously on the [Endnotes blog](#). It differs from the Chinese version mainly in the omission of footnotes explaining terms, names and events already well-known in the Anglophone world, or directing readers to existing Chinese sources.

The entire contents of the book are now accessible on the “[books](#)” section of our website, and print copies will soon be available from [Display Distribute](#) and select bookstores. If you are a distributor and would like to order copies, please contact us at [chuangcn@riseup.net](mailto:chuangcn@riseup.net). The book was designed and printed by the Guangdong-based collective DGT, with original illustrations by [Inko Ai Takita](#).

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**Neither Prophets nor Orphans:**

## ***Selected Translations from Endnotes***

### **既非先知亦非孤儿——《尾注》选译**

#### **Introduction**

This three-volume book compiles translations of key articles from the English-language communist journal *Endnotes*. Our aim in producing this book is to introduce Chinese readers to what we consider some of the most insightful theoretical work on contemporary society and popular struggles since the end of the twentieth century, all conducted in line with the broader political aims of overcoming capitalist society and constructing a communist world—where everyone can exercise control over their lives, and our metabolism with the natural environment can be sustainably transformed. Although *Endnotes* and some of the authors with whom they’ve engaged have been highly influential on the radical left of Europe and the Americas since the 2010s, and a few of their articles have previously been published in Chinese translation, their approach to political discussion is still virtually unknown in China. Even these authors’ use of words such as “communist” and “Marxist” may lead to misunderstandings in the Chinese context, so we urge readers to suspend any assumptions about what these terms mean until they’ve taken some time to read through this book with an open mind.

In lieu of an introduction, we start with an interview conducted with two of the journal’s editors in February 2024, asking about the history of *Endnotes*, the context of its interventions into left debates, and clarifications about some of the articles. To improve readability, we’ve made cosmetic changes to the dialogue and added footnotes. As background, it is helpful to look first at the editors’ own summary of their project:

*Endnotes* is a journal/book series published by a discussion group based in Germany, the UK and the US. The original group was formed in Brighton, UK in 2005 primarily from former participants in the journal *Aufheben*, after a critical exchange between *Aufheben* and the French journal *Théorie Communiste*. But with migration and the addition of new members the group has become increasingly international. *Endnotes* is primarily oriented towards conceptualising the conditions of possibility of a communist overcoming of the capitalist mode of production—and of the multiple structures of domination which pattern societies characterised by that mode of production—starting from present conditions. As such it has been concerned with debates in “communist theory”, and particularly the problematic of “communisation” which emerged from the post-68 French ultra-left; the question of gender and its abolition; the analysis of contemporary struggles, movements and political economy; the dynamics of surplus population

and its effects on capital and class; capitalist formations of “race”; value-form theory and systematic dialectics; the revolutionary failures and impasses of the 20th Century.<sup>1</sup>

The interview opens by looking back at the founders’ background in *Aufheben*, which emerged as a reading group from the UK’s proletarian movements of the early 1990s, launching the journal *Aufheben* in 1992. It is therefore also worthwhile to glance at that earlier group’s mission statement as well:

Our influences included the Italian Autonomia movement of 1969-77, the situationists, and others who took Marx’s work as a basic starting point and used it to develop the communist project beyond the anti-proletarian dogmatisms of Leninism (in all its varieties) and to reflect the current state of the class struggle. We also recognized the moment of truth in versions of class struggle anarchism, the German and Italian lefts and other tendencies. In developing proletarian theory we needed to go beyond all these past movements at the same time as we developed them—just as they had done with previous revolutionary movements.<sup>2</sup>

The question of how *Endnotes*’ theory of recent capitalist trends and their analysis of uprisings in various countries might be applied to China, or to what extent local experiences might point toward the need to revise some of *Endnotes*’ ideas, is something that we have begun to explore and remains a project that we hope Chinese readers pursue in the future. For now, we just hope that this book will spark some discussion and find resonance with local efforts to break free from the torture chambers of capital.

## **Interview with Two Members of the *Endnotes* Collective**

**(February 2024)**

### ***Origins***

**T. (an editor of this book):** Could you start by telling us about your experiences in *Aufheben* that led to the founding of *Endnotes*?

**J. (a founding member of *Endnotes*):** *Aufheben* was formed in the early 1990s. It came out of the movement against the poll tax, which was a successful non-payment campaign that ultimately played a role in the defeat of Margaret Thatcher.<sup>3</sup> Some of the members of *Aufheben* came together in a reading group involving participants in the non-payment campaign and other social struggles in Brighton. Some had influences from ultra-left tendencies in Germany and Italy, but they were also interested in the Italian Autonomia tradition, and they started by reading Marx’s *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*.

In its self-conception, the project was “open” in the sense that it was close to the tendency known as “Open Marxism,” which had emerged from the Conference of Socialist Economics in the 1970s, with people like Werner Bonefeld and John Holloway.<sup>4</sup> Aufheben attempted to retain that level of openness both in its theoretical work and in its relationship to social movements, such as the movements against the poll tax and the first Gulf War. Some members of Aufheben were highly involved in those struggles. Aufheben would conduct critical studies of social movements that its members were involved in, and one of the first was a close analysis of the campaign against the building of new highways that were destroying rural ecosystems at that time.<sup>5</sup> And then the anti-roads movement had as its urban corollary “Reclaim the Streets,” which was a party/protest movement linked to rave culture and environmentalism.<sup>6</sup> Reclaim the Streets was quite influential in the anti-globalization movement that emerged in the late ‘90s. For example, the notion of “diversity of tactics” that was prevalent in Seattle in ‘99 was first articulated in Reclaim the Streets. Several members of Aufheben wrote extensive critical reflections from within movements like these, drawing on theoretical work that came out of an intensive reading of Marx’s *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, but applying it non-academically as self-critical participants in various forms of class struggle.

Brighton was also a hub for unemployment struggles at that time, and several members of Aufheben were involved in the formation of an unemployed workers center there. For a time Brighton successfully resisted New Labour’s “workfare” regime, which imposed work onto the unemployed.<sup>7</sup> In the collective memory of Aufheben, this unemployed workers’ center was key to that success because they forged alliances with people working inside job centers, organized in the public sector unions, who were confronting workfare from the other side: from the side of those whose job it was to impose it on the unemployed.

**T:** What theoretical innovations did Aufheben make that would carry over into Endnotes?

**J:** This open orientation to theory and struggle would be the thing that inspired many of us from my generation to join Aufheben in the early 2000s, and later to form Endnotes. It became a sort of mantra or organizing principle for us. This is described in the article that covers some of this history in issue #5, “We Unhappy Few,”<sup>8</sup> which talks about the values around openness to new movements as they emerge, not trying to impose some rigid criteria about what we think is good or bad before we see what the struggles have to show for themselves. Similarly, in a theoretical vein, there was a self-conscious eclecticism, a willingness to draw on different theoretical traditions, to be undogmatic in our approach. Both of these things carried over into Endnotes.

**T:** What led to the split from Aufheben and the formation of Endnotes?

**J:** The key factor in the split was the reception of the critique that *Théorie Communiste* (TC) had made of *Aufheben* while translating and publishing our series of articles on “The Theory of Decadence.”<sup>9</sup> [...] What was interesting to many of us was that their critique seemed to occur at quite a deep level. They were interrogating and challenging our unstated presuppositions. Of course we sought to defend some of those presuppositions, but what was interesting is that we hadn’t had to defend them before. They’d been part of the group’s identity, and as such they were hard to interrogate, because to do so was to put the group’s identity into question. And certainly that’s what it felt like we were seeing when some of the older generation in *Aufheben* responded abrasively, in a way that was typical of *Aufheben*. For example, the group had been involved in polemical discussions around *Autonomia*, writing trenchant critiques of Antonio Negri, Leopoldina Fortunati and other theorists in the Italian tradition that we had been drawing on. [...]

But in the case of TC, we were faced with an enemy that had a different set of resources, in terms of the theoretical corpus that it could draw on after working together for 25 years—an extensive body of work that was hard for us to engage with, because it was all in French and written in an impenetrable prose. It was hard to pin them down and claim that we understood their faults, because that would require a lot of work. Some of the younger generation of *Aufheben* were assigned to do that work: to read through the corpus to find its weaknesses. But many of us felt, “that’s a bit of a weird way to engage with a rival group. Maybe there’s something to them that’s right as well. Maybe it’s not just a question of finding their weaknesses and coming up with the right riposte, that will defeat them once and for all. Maybe we can actually learn from this exchange.” That created a rift with some members of the older generation, who seemed less interested in the potential to learn from this exchange.

To be fair, I would still defend many of their ways of responding. For example, one of the key questions that came up was around the theory of alienation. TC had accused us of failing to recognize that the late Marx had abandoned the concept of alienation. But we knew this essentially Althusserian claim had serious flaws. So many of the responses that *Aufheben* made on that question were perfectly valid, at least when it comes to their reading of Marx. But TC’s issue with alienation was more than just a question of Marxology. They argued that the concept of alienation was allowing us to preserve a vision of proletarian self-affirmation, an idea of communism as the proletariat returning to its unalienated essence. And that vision fails to recognize the historical rupture that we’ve lived through. They were essentially arguing that the era of programmatism had come to an end.<sup>10</sup> So even though we were open to some of the arguments they were making about history and the limits of struggles today, in their view, we were still clinging too much to this sort of programmatic vision. And that enabled us to preserve

our role as activists, as intervening in things like the direct action movement, Reclaim the Streets and the other things that Aufheben was involved in, in a way that was about returning to the proletariat, returning to the workers movement. Being quite open to these new struggles, not dismissing them as many orthodox Marxists would do, but somehow believing that our role was to reconnect them to this “red thread” of the workers movement. Instead, TC argued that this red thread was a mirage, and that our efforts to identify it exemplified a programmatic vision. We needed to recognize that the thread was broken.

That was interesting to us, because it resonated with our sense that we wanted to be open to contemporary forms of struggle that didn’t take traditional forms. And TC were offering a way of thinking about this that was new, but which also refused to abandon the theory of the proletariat, or to abandon Marxism, as the post-structuralists would have us do, or people like [Ernesto] Laclau and [Chantal] Mouffe. It’s neither that sort of giddy excitement about the new that would lead us to forget the frameworks that are important for understanding the limits of struggle, but nor is it an attempt to see in these movements a return of the same—a return of the sort of workers movement that had its high points in the past, and that we’re somehow preserving a role as theorists and activists to memorialize those high points for the next wave. That was Aufheben’s uninterrogated self-conception that TC were pointing out. And that critique made sense for the younger generation, so we wanted to take it seriously. Most of the older generation weren’t interested in doing that, but some of them were, so they left together with us. Basically what happened is that the younger generation was unceremoniously expelled from the group, and then some of the older generation left in response. [...]

**T:** Could you provide some background on TC? That entire French ultra-left, post-situationist tradition that they came out of is still pretty much unknown in China.

**J:** I encountered TC before I joined Aufheben. I came to France in 2001 and met Gilles Dauvé, who was also involved in a debate with TC. At the time, unlike Aufheben, Dauvé seemed genuinely open to that debate, to what it put on the table. What was interesting about those debates is that they involved so many different things. They involved questions of normativity, you know: What are our fundamental goals in thinking, and how does our approach to theory relate to our desire to see a communist world or to see emancipation? That sort of philosophical, meta-theoretical reflection, at the same time that they were forcing us to confront the realities of individual struggles and our relationship to them in a practical manner. [...] We have a quote in Endnotes where we draw on Richard Gunn’s theory of Open Marxism, saying that a good conversation is one in which everything is open, in which both meta-

theoretical and analytical questions are being worked through at the same time. In such conversation any question can be raised, and nothing is off the table.

For us, TC was a group that had raised some questions that others in *Aufheben* didn't want to answer, but which we felt we should try to answer. And that was really issue 1.

***Endnotes #1: Preliminary Materials for Balance Sheet of the 20th Century (2008)***

Issue 1 of *Endnotes*, after several years of discussion, was our attempt to put on the table the questions that had been raised and try to think through them in a preliminary fashion. Several years of meeting on a biweekly basis in a reading group that involved six or seven people between London and Brighton, where we would read in an open-ended manner, both theoretical texts and more journalistic, applied ones. [...] It was a moment where we felt that we were exhilarated by the process of thinking in a way that none of us who had been through academia had experienced before, because we'd been so bored by academic discussion, and so hemmed in by activist discussion, that it became an oasis for us. A lot of discussion also involved our own psychological, personal questions including those related to the trauma from that split with *Aufheben*. Sometimes that would be difficult and challenging for us, but it could also be thrilling.

This culminated in issue 1, where we published the translations we'd done for that reading group, and reflected on it in the introduction and conclusion, trying to set a new stage where we would move from this intensive discussion to writing—but writing without really focusing on a particular audience. We were inspired by these French groups that had been churning out theory in the wilderness for decades, some of which had produced a few insightful jewels.

**T:** Could you tell us more about the first issue of *Endnotes*? This Chinese book starts with issue 2, since that's where your original writings begin, but it might be helpful background to summarize the debate between TC and Dauvé presented in issue 1, and your comments in the introduction and conclusion.

**J:** The meta-theoretical question was about normativity: how theoretical approaches can involve a teleology that has its source in normative ideals or desires. So in TC's critique of Dauvé [translated in *Endnotes* #1 as "Normative History and the Communist Essence of the Proletariat"], this refers to Dauvé's idea that communism is the essence of the proletariat, which just needs to realize itself through history. Maybe we can't know exactly what form this self-realization will take, and Dauvé isn't really the sort of dogmatist that TC sometimes makes him out to be, but the implication is that, rather than surveying the contemporary balance of class forces for its potentials and limits in a neutral manner (as TC claims to be doing), Dauvé is

projecting onto his analysis of struggles a trans-historical vision of communism that is working its way out, and which was already implicit in Marx's conception of communism in 1848 (or in the 1860s, whenever you think that conception was identified). And Dauvé defends that view of the essence of the proletariat as a trans-historical truth about the nature of the class forces in capitalism, implying communism is latent with this essence.

Before encountering TC, many of us would have defended a similar view, drawing on Hegelian Marxism and other tendencies. At the same time, TC seem to be a little naive in thinking that they don't have their own normative framing, and that their vision of the objective, neutral approach is not influenced by their own kind of essentialism. It's true that it carries with it this sort of structuralist ethos. They're not directly influenced by Althusser, but they're clearly influenced by his milieu. And so most people who encountered TC, who were familiar with the history of Marxism, smell a kind of neo-structuralism that appears similar to the kind of pseudoscientific, Althusserian structuralism that had its heyday in the late 1970s.

So we were influenced but not entirely persuaded by their non-normative approach. To us the most important thing was that their debate with Dauvé had this capaciousness to it that was seriously lacking in many other debates that we had been encountering within the left: it touched on everything, revolutionary history, communist theory, and meta-theoretical questions about the nature of communist thought. So we published that debate because we felt that, whatever you think about the different sides to this debate, there's no question that this is the kind of debate we wanted to be having. [...] And so we published issue 1 because it sort of modeled the quality of theoretical engagement that we were aspiring to. [...]

### ***Endnotes #2: Misery and the Value Form (2010)***

**T:** Two articles from issue 2 have been translated into Chinese for this book: "Communization and Value-Form Theory," and "Misery and Debt." What was the social context that gave rise to those articles and the issue as a whole?

**J:** In a sense issue 2 is the first issue, because it was the first time we really spoke in our own voice. As far as the social context, obviously [the economic crisis of] 2007-2008 was the event of our lives, which shaped our understanding of the conjuncture of capitalism that we're living in. Issue 2 was our first attempt to understand what happened in 2007 through various pieces, including the [issue's] introduction [titled] "Crisis in the Class Relation," as well as in "Misery and Debt," "Notes on the New Housing Question"—all those articles were attempts to think through the crisis using those themes that we'd been discussing for years and new ideas that



we'd just encountered. Some of those new ideas were introduced by [B. and another new member] who had just joined at that time. [B.] do you want to say more about this?

**B. (Endnotes member who joined after the publication of issue 1):** I think that's what was really interesting about that moment. It's like you guys had this group with a longer history that predates issue 2, but I think you're right that the moment of the 2007-2008 crisis, and then of all of these [mass] movements that emerged from it, had a big effect on bringing people together and shaping issue 2. Maybe we should say something about the relationship between the debates with *Théorie Communiste* and the publication of "Misery and Debt." [J], how would you say our rereading of Marx around crisis theory relates to our debates with TC?

**J:** I'd say we'd gone as far as we could go with the question of communization and our engagement with TC in its own terms. [...] There was a sense that what we really needed was to expand our horizons when it came to thinking about crisis, and about communism as well. One expression of that was the article "Communization and Value-Form Theory," where we're essentially saying, "This is really interesting, but there's a lot of other traditions that are important to us, and one of them is this German tradition, and we're interested in seeing how the debates around TC and communization speak to these theoretical tendencies which have been ignored in those French debates." [...]

But then I think the more important thing is the nature of the crisis itself, the fact of its originality, that we're clearly in a new era in some sense. So there was a need to draw on historical and maybe even economic theory, other theories of crisis and history that TC may not have had access to. One of the sources of those theories that was important to us came via [B. and another new member M.].

**B:** Yeah, and one way we understood the relevance of TC's work to the new conjuncture was, they had this theory of "a crisis of the reproduction of the class relation," and we were trying to show that there were resources in Marx for thinking about that crisis, which TC hadn't used. And that related to the work that [M.] and I had been doing. We had been trying to show that there was a way of reading Marx that wasn't just about cyclical crises and periodic downturns, but about a long-term secular trend, a long-term trajectory of transformation. When you read the later chapters of *Capital* volume 1, you end up with this theory where Marx sees the long run tendency of the system as producing, on the one hand, surplus populations and, on the other, surplus capital, which he talks about more in volume three. So we developed this whole theory [in "Misery and Debt"], tying that to a particular theory of technological development in capitalism: this tendency towards what we called "technological ratcheting effects," where new industries are constantly being born as the old ones go away, but the new ones are born using

the technologies that had already been developed in past industries. So it's not just that one industry replaces another, but that they're constantly pressed upward technologically to absorb less labor and less capital.

Then there's a second part [of "Misery and Debt"] where we talk about why this theory didn't apply in Marx's time—why his prediction for the 1870s failed to come true. There we talk about the history of what we call "the infrastructural industries," the way that industry transformed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century so that it actually needed a lot more labor and capital, rather than expelling them, and that this was something that Marx [hadn't foreseen]. We trace out how, from about 1870 to 1970, there was this long period of industrialization, where Marx had expected deindustrialization, but then after about 1973 this long-run tendency that Marx had analyzed was finally coming true. So there was this deep affinity between our own time and the time when Marx had lived. The predictions he made were right, but at a hundred years delay. Meanwhile, during that hundred-year period, the whole theory of Marxism had changed to accommodate the fact that this basic prediction hadn't come true. So we were saying you have to go back now to the original theory, that this is what Marx had expected and actually it was coming true—that Marx really is a theorist of deindustrialization, but that only happened in the more recent period.

So that was ["Misery and Debt"], and it ends on a dark note about how these surplus populations are to be managed, from the perspective of capital, as these pools of unnecessary labor. [After issue 2 was published,] we were wrongly understood as having argued that this surplus population was to be the new subject of history, as if we were taking a sort of Fanonian perspective that those who are excluded are the real revolutionary subject. I don't even know if that's an accurate reading of Fanon, but that was what we were taken to be promoting—a kind of Black Panther, Fanonian vision of the surplus population as revolutionary subject. So in later texts, especially in "An Identical Object-Subject?"<sup>11</sup> we tried to clarify that we were not claiming there was a new revolutionary subject, but that instead we were trying to mark the decomposition of the proletariat as a revolutionary agent in capitalist society—not in a negative way of saying that revolution is impossible, but that this decomposition was fundamental. Instead of claiming that one of the proletariat's fragments was becoming a new revolutionary subject, we were saying that decomposition or fragmentation itself is the core feature of this period that we should be paying attention to.

Part of the argument we were making was the idea, which we got from TC, that we live in an era where it is no longer possible to affirm or see the proletariat as a positive pole for revolutionary change. The goal can no longer be to unify the working class and set up a worker society, because once you have this process of decomposition and the emergence of this large surplus

population, then the part of the class that's still growing is doing so in this negative way, [which only exacerbates the class's fragmentation and prevents any fraction from becoming hegemonic in any positive sense that could point toward revolution].

Another clarification that ["An Identical Abject-Subject"] made is that we had never said in ["Misery and Debt"] that the surplus population doesn't work, but we were often interpreted as if we had been saying that it was fully excluded from market relations. In reality, we had argued that surplus proletarians are included in all kinds of ways, just in a significantly reduced way, either being paid lower wages, working more intermittently, or being self-employed in the informal sector. We showed how even Marx had this clear analysis of the different parts of the surplus population, that they were all working in different ways, and how that distinguished them from "paupers"—people who couldn't work at all anymore.

**T:** Could you clarify whether the term "surplus population" should refer to a specific fragment of the proletariat or a general condition of the proletariat as a whole?

**B:** That's a really interesting question. Over time, I've come to understand it as a political question. That is to say that in some societies, like in Europe, and actually in much of the global South too, maybe including China, there's a real effort to protect part of the working class from being exposed to insecurity on the labor market. In those cases you can have a large part of the proletariat that is securely employed alongside another part that is surplus and insecurely employed. And so you have these ways that countries try to handle the problem of superfluity that is about drawing these clear boundaries between inside and outside groups.

But then you have other societies like the United States, and parts of the global South in a different way, where there's no effort to do that, so the condition of superfluity spreads more broadly through the population. And when you have this problem where there's a lot of people looking for work and not enough jobs, societies can try to handle that through policies, on the one hand, or through struggles between workers and capital, on the other. Depending on how they handle it, in some countries the forms of superfluity express themselves in more diffuse ways as generalized insecurity, falling labor shares of income, etc., while in other countries, superfluity is much more concentrated within a particular group of people. And then that can take on other dimensions that [J.] knows more about, like racialization. You can have these situations where the fragment that's been specifically reduced to a superfluous condition is racialized or marginalized in other ways as well, to be identified with particular ethnic groups, for example. [...]

***Endnotes #3: Gender, Race, Class and Other Misfortunes (2013)***

**T:** Although the Chinese book won't include the article on racialization ("The Limit Point of Capitalist Equality"), I think we should talk about it, along with two other articles from issue 3 that are included: "The Logic of Gender" and "The Holding Pattern." But first could you speak more generally about the issue?

**J:** Well, the guiding idea behind issue 3 was that we went from responding to the crisis as such to responding to the new struggles that emerged in its aftermath. In issue 2, only "Sleep-Worker's Enquiry" deals with a struggle, in some sense, but really the whole issue is talking in these grand historical terms and theoretical terms, whereas issue three is our attempt to make sense of the emergent political expressions of the crisis—in some ways quite delayed political expressions, but issue 3 was also delayed. We got it out after the beginning of the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street.

**B:** The two big articles were "The Holding Pattern," which was a broad historical, kind of Olympian overview [of struggles in various countries], and then "A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats," which provided a very focused, subjective account of the London riots [in 2011].

For me, "The Holding Pattern" was where Endnotes crystallized into a theory of our times. In our previous analysis of crisis, we had been talking about the tendency of capitalist society to generate surplus populations, and then with "The Holding Pattern," we were trying to understand how their existence was transforming struggles. I think if we had access to a slightly longer historical arc at that time, we would have investigated those effects over a longer time scale, but in that article we were really focused on [the period from 2010 to 2013]. And what we were particularly honing in on was the way that struggles were being defined around the different interests and perspectives of these two groups: [on the one hand,] workers with secure positions, whose struggles tried to defend against further losses in terms of layoffs or the loss of rights and conditions; and [on the other hand,] proletarians without secure jobs, who were] often showing up to struggles in much larger numbers, demanding something quite different—because it wasn't that they had something they were in danger of losing, but that they had never been included in the first place.

We became interested in the way that these struggles were being transformed by the need of these groups to work together, and the fact that in order to work together, they had to overcome their specificities. We were especially interested in the examples where the precarious and insecure, superfluous wing of the movement kind of overwhelmed and transformed the struggles of the secure workers. We thought that there were tendencies in all these struggles between 2010 and 2013 that suggested a possible future for struggle that we had first seen in

Argentina [in the nationwide general strike, riots and takeover of factories by workers following the economic crisis of 2001], as analyzed by Aufheben and TC.<sup>12</sup>

But the problem for these struggles was that the state had managed, through its crisis management techniques, to stop the crisis from turning into a depression, so they managed to contain it. We had this whole argument, originally presented as a blog post called “Two Aspects of Austerity.”<sup>13</sup> The idea was that the state had spent a huge amount of money to stop the crisis from spreading further, but then it became concerned that spending all this money was endangering the long-term health of the system, so states were spending a lot of money to stop the depression from coming while simultaneously imposing austerity on social services. That’s obviously what a lot of the non-securely employed, non-unionized workers were struggling over: all these cuts that they were experiencing. According to our analysis, the specific form that crisis management took in this era meant that struggles became focused on this idea that the state was acting irrationally. Actually we thought that states were acting quite rationally, given the constraints they were under, but the movements experienced the state as irrational, because it was spending a lot of money [to bail out financial institutions, for example] while simultaneously making them suffer, putting the crisis on the backs of the workers. So what should have been a crisis of capitalism became a crisis around the state, democracy, representation and so on.

**T:** Okay, now let’s move on to “The Logic of Gender.” Back when that article was translated into Chinese a few years ago, [B.] gave a couple presentations on it, so maybe you could just summarize those now?

**B:** Sure. “Logic of Gender” was partly a response to a series of texts that *Théorie Communiste* had written about gender.<sup>14</sup> They had claimed that there were two fundamental contradictions in capitalist society: [one between capital and labor, and another between men and women]. [M., one of the two main authors of “The Logic of Gender”] and to some extent the rest of us had a debate with TC around this ultimately Maoist but also Althusserian use of the term “contradiction” to mean *antagonism*, and the effort to describe how many antagonisms there were in society or how many contradictions there were.<sup>15</sup> Of course from an American perspective, if you were going to say there was a fundamental antagonism besides that of *class*, it was hard to imagine not also saying that *race* had that characteristic. TC rejected this, but it was not just that they denied the point so much as they didn’t seem interested in engaging in this debate. They actually seemed quite upset about this criticism. This was ironic because in later years they ended up producing a series of writings about racism. [...]

So that sort of non-debate with TC encouraged us to engage in a longer exploration of these questions about gender. The article’s starting point is the big transformation in women’s lives

since the 1970s. Women are having fewer children, they're now increasingly lifelong participants in the workforce, and yet they still face all these disadvantages that are tied to their gender: They're paid less money than men, they're working more insecure jobs, they're doing more housework, divorce remains much more catastrophic for women than for men in terms of income, etc. So the question was why emancipation from the housewife role, which took place from the 1960s to the '80s, didn't lead to a broader emancipation for women. And the problem that the article focuses on is that the categories available to feminists for thinking about the capitalist economy were mostly developed in the 1960s and '70s in France, the US and Italy, and they were based on the premise that housework was something specific and separate from other forms of work. The idea of the article is that the distinctions at the core of this earlier conceptualization from second-wave feminism and the Marxist feminisms from various countries in that period aren't useful for us today. In those older theories there are central distinctions between production and reproduction, between paid labor versus unpaid labor, and between public versus private. The use of the terms public and private was always a bit odd, because the private was used to mean the private household, but the public thus included the private (market) economy. The problem is that in the course of what happened in the 1970s and '80s, a lot of this so-called "reproductive work" that was performed in the home by housewives was increasingly now being performed in the private economy with paid labor. In many middle-class households, women went to work and got professional jobs and then started to hire maids to perform reproductive tasks like taking care of their kids, so a lot of this work is now being done in a new way through the mediation of the market. So the article proposes a more precise way to explain the persistence of gender in this era when women have become full participants in the labor market. [...]

For Marx there's this idea that workers are paid less than the value they produce in the course of the workday. So there's this distinction between labor and labor-power, or between labor-time and labor-power. What Marx says is that the worker's wage is enough to buy a basket of goods that allows for the reproduction of the worker as a worker, so they can show up the next day and work. The issue that "The Logic of Gender" talks about is that there's actually this transformation that has to take place, where the worker's wage allows for the purchase of all these goods and services, but then they have to be transformed through household production in order to actually reproduce the workforce. So there's this type of labor that's fundamental to capitalism, but that's not considered labor in the traditional Marxian sense. What the text tries to do is to qualify what were very hard distinctions in this earlier mode by distinguishing between two sets of activities: "directly market mediated" (DMM) activities, where there's an exchange of money for work or products, and then "indirectly market mediated" (IMM) spheres, where there's a lot of

activity that requires or interacts with all these market activities, but is not itself directly market mediated, so it doesn't involve the exchange of money for either work or commodities.

The idea of the Italian Marxist-feminists had been to say that both indirectly and directly market mediated activities are kinds of labor, it's just that the IMM ones are unpaid labor, and that there'd be more gender equality if all labor were paid. So there was this movement called "Wages for Housework" to achieve that goal. But what really happened was more complicated because women entered the workforce, and then a lot of former housework became market mediated, not only in the sense that people start hiring maids to work at home, but also that they're now purchasing a lot more prepared meals, paying for childcare and so on. There's also a lot of work, which was formerly housework, that's now being handled through public systems, government mediated crèches or childcare. So the article exams this distinction between DMM work—which is subsumed under the law of value, which is standardized, in which there's an effort to transform that work to make it more efficient and measurable because you're paying for the specific amount of time people are working—and, on the other hand, IMM work, which is not waged, it's done by people in their free time, and it doesn't have to be done efficiently because no one's being paid for it directly, so there aren't the same kinds of constraints and the law of value doesn't operate in that sense.

Even the boundaries around what counts as this work is hard to say. Part of the reproduction of the labor consists of things like brushing your teeth, exercising, playing sports or hanging out with your children, so it's hard to say which parts of these activities are actually work and which aren't. But the text isn't trying to answer those questions or find exact boundaries. It's just providing a conceptual language that allows us to distinguish between what kinds of work are distinct and measurable, and what kinds are indistinct and difficult to delineate.

Then the article describes the transformation in this sphere, how a lot of what were formerly IMM activities became DMM and were transformed, so a lot of activities that used to be associated with women as such, like childcare, are now performed in this other way that denaturalizes them because they're just waged work, rather than specifically women's work, even though they remain highly feminized. So the text tries to understand the different ways that gender persists in the face of this transformation. Why does gender remain? And it tries to capture the ways that, even though this transformation has occurred and there's been this marketization of a lot of formerly unmarketized activity, women remain tied to that activity.

**T:** Other than providing a more precise explanation of how gender works in capitalist society and how it's changed throughout history, what would you say are the political implications of that piece?

**B:** [...] At the time there was a debate with Sylvia Federici about austerity measures and how a lot of activities that were formerly done through state-mediated functions, like education, childcare, healthcare, eldercare, etc., were now undergoing austerity budget cuts. So a lot of activities that women around the world had not been responsible for, in some sense, were now becoming things that women were responsible for once again. In response, some authors started saying “We’re winning these things back!”—like they had this positive conception of non-market mediated activity, and they saw women taking over these caring roles again as a good thing. Federici was associated with this camp, although I’m not sure whether she actually committed to that view in print.

In any case, for the authors of “The Logic of Gender,” this was a disturbing conclusion to reach that had a lot to do with these conceptual distinctions and ideas about women’s role in society, which the authors of the piece felt were very wrong. Because in fact, what was happening was that women were being forced back into these traditional roles. The authors call that process “abjection,” this experience of being forced to resume the unequal and lesser position of having to do a lot of unwaged housework and care work, and of being pushed back into this domestic role. So that was the immediate political implication: to fight against certain forms of social reproduction theory, all these theories like eco-feminism that have a more positive conception of women’s reproductive activities, claiming that the problem is just that society hasn’t valued these activities enough and now we need to change our attitude toward them. “The Logic of Gender” takes a different approach by denying the positivity of these things and seeing them as just as much a part of capitalism, even if unwaged, as everything else.

It was also part of a broader move within that issue of *Endnotes* that said capitalism doesn’t merely eradicate older forms of difference and antagonism internal to the proletariat. There’s this idea from Marx, that “All that is solid melts into air,” that these internal antagonisms based on language and race, gender, all these things tend to melt away as capitalism’s juggernaut advances, and as the cash nexus advances. But contrary to that traditional Marxist idea, *Endnotes* was interested in investigating the ways that capitalism also reproduced internal antagonisms, transformed them and even created new ones. This was part of our political project, if you can use the word political—it’s very controversial to say that there are these antagonisms internal to the proletariat that can only be overcome through the overthrow of capitalism, or as TC would put it, the unification of humanity is something that happens through confronting the fact that class belonging, being a member of a class, becomes an obstacle to class struggle itself. *Endnotes* wanted to extend that concept and say that race, gender roles, all of these other social categories could be, and in fact were in the context of the movements of



squares, experienced as obstacles to the advance of the struggle, because these social categories would divide people against one another.

That was part of a broader analysis that we called “the composition problem” [in “The Holding Pattern”]. We tried to think about how all of these different antagonisms internal to the proletariat, which capitalism reproduced and even intensified and inflamed, would become obstacles to unification in struggle, obstacles to composing the working class as a fighting force against capitalism.

**J:** But I would put a bit of a caveat there: I think it is true that many Marxists who write about gender and race try to derive the normative political conclusion that it’s impossible to resolve problems of racial and gender inequality within capitalism, in part because that means they can then say, “There’s one solution, revolution!” But I think we were trying not to have a normative political conclusion right up front that was shaping our assumptions about this. We were trying to ask an open-ended, non-normative question about the role of gender in capitalism. And while we disagreed with TC strongly over certain questions, they were really not over political questions, but rather over their particular reading of history, or their particular reading of what gender is, so it was again this sort of working through the matter without necessarily knowing where we would end up. So while the political conclusions that [B.] is pointing to were there, it’s more like retrospectively we can look back and think of what they might be, but at the time that wasn’t our intention to come up with certain political line on gender.

**T:** The other part of the composition problem and the other antagonism that has been mentioned is race. Could you two summarize “The Limit Point of Capitalist Equality” from issue 3 (which is not in the book) and then talk a little bit about “Brown v. Ferguson” from issue 4 (which is in the book)?

**J:** In issue 3 we’re trying to talk about race, gender and class as identities, and trying to think about the different kinds of identity politics that they imply, but at the same time, we’re precisely not saying that these are structurally mirroring one another in any sense. The social divisions these concepts refer to are both very different from one another, both in nature and in how we might explain them—and thus, maybe quite different in the political conclusions you might make about how to overcome them. But again, the focus was: How do we understand the form of politics that is expressed in these languages today, and what might be behind that? What logics of political economy, or of history, might explain these manifest divisions?

So when it comes to race, we presented a very different approach, which is sketched in quite loose theoretical terms in “The Limit Point of Capitalist Equality” by Chris Chen, and is then unpacked analytically in “A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats” and “Brown v. Ferguson.”

The key to how we think about racial inequality is, first, that it’s neither trans-historical nor transnational in scope. We can’t think transnationally about it in the sense that the causes of racial inequality can be very different in different contexts. There are cases where we can’t find it, or we could try to fit some versions of ethnic or religious division into a framework of racial inequality, but then we’d be collapsing the distinction between race, ethnicity, religion etc. There’s thus a lot more historical contingency that we need to take account of when we’re trying to explain racial inequality, so we focus on the specific racial history of the US in “Brown v. Ferguson” and “The Limit Point of Capitalist Equality” on the one hand, and of the UK in “A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats” on the other. It’s true that that historical specificity can usually be related to the theory of surplus population that we developed in “Misery and Debt” and elsewhere, but it’s not reducible to that, because it’s not the case that everywhere you get a surplus population, you get this thing called race that always takes the same form. Nor is it the case that the existence of racial division always reflects a surplus population dynamic. I wouldn’t say that about 19th century America at all, for example: Under such a slave society, the logic of racial inequality isn’t at all mapped onto a surplus population. There are almost by definition no surplus slaves. To the extent that we can generalize about race at all, it seems to be a distinctive feature of post-colonial, post-slave regimes in which either (often former colonial) migrant labor or a kind of underclass defined by a longer history of discrimination can be mapped onto the surplus population dynamic that becomes a distinctive feature of deindustrialization and late industrialization. [...]

One of the key quotes in “Brown v. Ferguson” is from a Maoist academic in the 1960s who was trying to imagine what deindustrialization would mean for the future. And he speculates in a fantastical way about the use of incarceration to manage the surplus population, but he thinks of it as impossible. Within his framework, it’s impossible to imagine the use of the prison to manage what will increasingly become the problem of the racialized surplus population in the US. For us, that’s really instructive because it shows that the logic was not yet present. It wasn’t yet conceivable in 1960s America, in a context of relatively high employment. Many people have tried to think about the surplus population as a general framework or description of racialized labor markets in America, and this is to some extent the challenge that Chris Chen sets himself in “The Limit Point of Capitalist Equality”, but what he shows is that we can thereby lose sight of the actual historical dynamics generating racialization.

In earlier articles where we had discuss the theory of surplus population at more abstract level: “Misery and Debt,” “Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture,” “Identical Abject Subject”— but in “Brown v. Ferguson,” we map those onto the specificities of American history: What is it about the black experience in the US that led to the surplus population being coded black? By contrast, “A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats” has a discussion of the black experience in England and how different it is. Then in “Onward Barbarians,” we bring all this more up to date with contemporary abolitionist politics in the US, thinking about the relationship between abolition today and the earlier wave of Black Lives Matter. However, none of those articles could be described as presenting a theory of race in general.

**T:** “The Limit Point of Capitalist Equality” is sometimes taken as presenting a particular theory of racialization.

**J:** Yeah, it’s interesting because the author Chris Chen has an eliminativist approach to the concept of race. He uses the concepts of race only in quotation marks, thus taking a hard line against attempts to naturalize or reify race in our language. He suggests we should take a step back and ask ourselves “are we reproducing racism when we even adopt the concept of race?” [...] In his subsequent writings I’ve noted that Chris no longer always uses quotation marks in reference “race” or racial terminology, but in that article Chris was problematizing the concept of race by radically decentering it, talking about the *process* of racialization rather than taking “race” or “racism” for granted. That’s why I describe his position as eliminativist, although the term he uses is “abolitionist,” by which he means that we should be trying to abolish the concept of race rather than treating it as something that could have its own logic, something that could “take on a life of its own” as so many theorists of racism have suggested [...] One implication of this is that race is always in flux. Racial boundaries are never fixed, so as means of organizing and ordering social life race is always contingent on a particular historical, spatial and political context. As a result it’s much harder to come up with a broad theory that can account for the specific dynamics of racial oppression.

#### ***Endnotes #4: Unity in Separation (2015)***

[“History of Separation” in issue 4 is the place where the category of “class” is examined along the lines sketched out in the editorial to issue 3—not as a logical “contradiction” (a term that Marx uses only in the Hegelian sense, describing the relationship between use-value and exchange-value), but rather a social “antagonism” between groups within capitalism, comparable to race and gender, which has a basic structural position but also varies according to time and place, involving elements of identity politics.]

**B:** In order to understand “History of Separation” it needs to be placed within the context of its conception as part of a bigger project, which we called “Yesterday—Today—Tomorrow.”

**J:** That title was based on an article by [the German council communist] Paul Mattick [(1904-1981), called “Marxism: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow].<sup>16</sup>

**B:** The idea was that we were writing this text with three parts: “Yesterday,” “Today,” and “Tomorrow.” And the text just got longer and longer. “Yesterday” became “History of Separation,” “Today” became “The Holding Pattern,” and “Tomorrow” became “Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture.” And what’s funny is that “The Holding Pattern” was published as the first article in issue 3, “Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture” was the last article in that issue, and then “History of Separation” is in *Endnotes* #4, although we refer to it in those earlier articles as “forthcoming.” So “yesterday” came after “tomorrow”. But the way it was supposed to work was that, if you remember when I was describing “Misery and Debt,” it’s structured by saying that Marx had a prediction about what was going to happen to capitalism in his time, which was deindustrialization and the expansion of the surplus populations. Then between 1870 and 1970, capitalism took a different turn and you had this new period of industrialization with the rise of infrastructural industries, known as the Second Industrial Revolution. So there’s this long period from 1870 to 1970 where Marx’s theory doesn’t apply to any of this other experience of the workers’ movement. And then from 1970 onward, it does apply again.

So in “Yesterday—Today—Tomorrow,” the idea was that “History of Separation” covered the period from 1870 to 1970 when Marx was wrong, “The Holding Pattern” covered the reemergence of the crisis tendencies and struggles that Marx imagined would happen, and finally “Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture,” was an attempt to describe what struggle would look like in the future, and how a revolution could emerge from struggles that did not have the kind of institutional features that grounded the workers movement in the 1870 to 1970 period. So we have this buildup and then sclerosis, the fossilization of trade unions and political parties. The idea was that those things were breaking down today, and tomorrow they would become much less relevant to the types of struggles that would occur. [...]

For me, like my version of *Endnotes*—this isn’t necessarily other peoples’ conception of the *Endnotes* project, but at least it’s the one shared by the two of us—the transition from writing “History of Separation” to developing this fully integrated theory across those texts was the complete *Endnotes* theory. It was truly apocalyptic, from the beginning to the end. It had a biblical, messianic character of explaining the whole thing. [...] We spent years researching “History of Separation,” and we’re still planning on turning it into a book.

One of the things that we ended up focusing on was the idea that Marx got two things wrong about this period from 1870 to 1971. One was about the persistence of the peasantry. That was something he discovered later in life. In his late writings, he came to understand that there was no necessity of a transition from peasant-based farming to capitalist agriculture, so the stage theory was wrong. After Marx died, the global peasantry lasted a lot longer than he had imagined. Drawing on sources such as Gáspár Tamás (a now deceased Hungarian Marxist), we showed that the persistence of the peasantry also involved the persistence of old-regime elites, such as landed aristocracies. That posed a problem, not just for the emergence of capitalism, but also for the workers' movement, because often those old-regime elites did not want to extend liberal freedoms to the working class. They wanted to deeply restrict participation in political processes. So the workers movement ended up having to fight to promote liberal freedoms that, in Marx's view, was supposed to come automatically with the expansion of capitalism and bourgeois revolutions. This is something Trotsky and others wrote about.

The other big flaw was the one we already discussed: that industrialization created more jobs and was more sustainable than Marx had imagined. It seemed to open up a pathway towards the idea that, instead of the excluded proletarians revolting against society and creating some new world, there was actually a lot of space within that industrializing era for workers to be integrated into the economy. And our big idea there was that, although industrialization turned out to be stronger than Marx predicted, it was weaker than what the workers' movement needed in order to generate the kind of political power that it aimed for.

So the workers movement became an advocate for more industrialization and pushing industrial modernity further. In this way, our account drew on Jacques Camatte as much as TC to ask: How did Marxism become a theory of modernization? How did the theory of revolution against capitalism become a theory of how to carry out industrialization, and how the workers movement could become not just a junior partner, but the actual organizer of this process. We traced the history of that, with different parts of the article going into different aspects, but overall it traces the arc of workers' struggles in the era of industrialization and the effects of the end of that era on their strategies.

Compared with other histories of this period—for example I just read one by Mike McNair called *Revolutionary Strategy*, which became the basis for neo-Kautskyian theories, and what you see there and across a lot of the Marxist left is this idea that the true revolutionary strategy reveals itself through the experiences of left parties and working-class movements. What's often assumed is that there's this constant static background, that we're fighting the same struggles we've always been fighting. And the goal becomes to look at past experiences to discern what

the correct strategy is for today. By contrast, what “A History of Separation” is doing, with regard to revolutionary strategy, is to show people that actually it’s not the same conditions every time. There’s a secular transformation that’s been transforming capitalism, transforming the struggles workers experience, and transforming the strategic problems that their movements confront. We show that any efforts to build a revolutionary theory on the analysis of the greatest hits of past revolutionary activity are doomed to fail, because it’s structurally occluding—it prevents the developers of those theories from recognizing that conditions had fundamentally changed. [...]

**T:** One review of “History of Separation” described it as an “identity politics” reading of the workers movement. What do you think of that claim?

**B:** Yeah, there’s this way that Marxists want to pose the idea of class as something different from identity, that identities that are just surface-level identifications that workers make, whereas class is like the deep essence of their being. But in one sense the workers movement was the modern era’s largest and most successful identitarian movement aside from nationalism. It was precisely what those analyses assumed was the significance and appeal of a workers’ identity that actually had to be constructed. So yeah, that was a big claim of the text: that we should understand the construction of the workers’ identity as a shared class perspective, as something that had to be produced, rather than a pre-existing essence.

**J:** There’s a way that could be misread too, though. I think the editorial to issue 3 was probably misread in this way, because there’s a line where we talk about the issue’s subject matter: *Gender, Race, Class, and Other Misfortunes*. People can read it as an argument that these are interchangeable categories that are all merely categories of identity. But I think it should be clear in “History of Separation” that for us, while the workers’ movement should be understood as a movement that produced a collective worker’s identity, we’re not saying that class is *merely* an identity. [...]

**B:** Yeah, class is also a structural position. But in a political sense, it takes the form of an identity, or at least in that period of history—we didn’t even say that was true in all times. It was true in the era of the workers movement, that it was specifically organized around an affirmation of a class identity. I think that analytical distinction is important.

**T:** The editorial [and those articles discussed above] also says that gender and race are not mere identities either, right? Conventional Marxists have often claimed that class is like this real, material position, and that gender and race are just surface-level identities, but Endnotes is saying that all three of them are both identities and structural positions within capitalism.

**J:** But also very distinct kinds of structural position, right? It's easy to take the idea of structural position as interchangeable in a way that we would not accept.

**B:** I think also what we tried to do there, and we were going to write an article about this but never got around to it, but we mentioned that Marx makes this distinction between contradiction and antagonism that we thought was very important.<sup>17</sup> There's this way that especially Maoists and then Althusser by way of Maoism read contradiction and antagonism as synonyms, so that you can talk about a contradiction between classes. We got into this big debate with *Théorie Communiste* because there's no place where Marx uses contradiction in that sense. Marx is coming out of this Hegelian tradition where a contradiction really is a logical category, so you can describe the capitalist mode of production as contradictory because it's built on an internal tension that it can't resolve. There's a logical contradiction at the heart of the system's organization that expresses itself as a tension that the society can't resolve. [...] That systematic contradiction has a dynamic that tends toward dissolution [of the system], which then transforms antagonisms within society. So you can have one contradiction that guides a contradictory society, but that can express itself across a range of social antagonisms.

The other way we talked about [the relationship between class, on the one hand, and other lines of antagonism such as race and gender, on the other] was the idea that there were these structural features of capitalism that divided workers, right? [...] Marx understood that there were all these differences between people that created tensions among them. He thought that over time, capitalism would tend to eradicate those differences and make class the most salient aspect of a person's experience. I'm not sure if Marx thought there could be an affirmable working-class identity, but that was supposed to become the basis of the workers movement. But what really happened is that capitalism transformed a lot of these sources of fragmentation and difference within the working class. It didn't eradicate them. So we thought you needed a theory that could explain the persistence and structural transformation of all of these internal differentiations within the working class.

One way to summarize our relationship to TC that you get glimpses of in the editorial to issue 3, and in "The Logic of Gender" and the preface to "History of Separation," is that we were continuing the conversation with TC, trying to resolve problems [we saw in their framework].

**J:** Yes, in some ways we were still trying to work within what we learned from TC, what we thought was inspiring about their approach. What was inspiring about TC's theory for us was precisely that it liberated us from some of the constraints that *Aufheben's* approach to theory had imposed on us—in particular TC's historical way of understanding capitalism. The new way of understanding capitalism as what we call a "moving contradiction" in issue 2.<sup>18</sup> But then

“History of Separation” in issue 4 is about the limits of the way TC are trying to apply these categories. So we’re trying to resolve those problems by doing a close reading of capitalist history. We were trying both to historicize TC and to historicize our own time, because the crisis of 2007 forced us to think about what it meant to be living in what seems to be a new era. But at the same time that we were doing that, TC was moving away from their own historical focus towards this more transhistorical conception of gender and the idea of a “dual contradiction” as expressed in their articles on gender. So in the editorial of issue 3 we pointed out that this new theory they were developing actually lost sight of what we had found the most interesting about their theory until then, because it left the terrain of historicizing capitalism and reached for this far more abstract [theory, which was] more reliant on Althusserian structuralist Marxism.

**T:** [B.], you mentioned that “Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture” [from issue 3] was conceived as the third part of a series including “History of Separation” about the past and “The Holding Pattern” about the present. Unfortunately, we didn’t include that article in the book, but since it’s so important, could you summarize it for us in relation to those other two articles and Endnotes’ project as a whole?

**B:** [...] “Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture” was partly about the idea that we had been taken incorrectly to be saying [in “Misery and Debt,” for example] that the future struggles, unlike those of the past, will mostly take the form of riots. We had been understood as saying that, during the long period of the labor movement from 1870 to 1970, struggles in this earlier period had been organized through unions and political parties, but as these mediating forms broke down, we would have unmediated riotous struggles. So just as we had to argue against this idea that the surplus populations could become the new revolutionary agent, we also had to argue against the idea that the riot was the [proto-revolutionary] form [of proletarian resistance] particular to our times. True, we wrote about riots [in “A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats” for example], but no one who actually read that article could interpret it as a celebration of the form—it was all about the limits of [the riot] as a form.

So “Spontaneity, Mediation, Rupture” analyzed how struggles organize themselves when there aren’t these pre-existing mediating forms available to them, such as unions and parties. One way to think about what we’re interested in is how struggles give rise to new tactics, but also to new organizational forms, new contents of struggle. We’re interested in the way that struggles create organizations to further their own struggles. And two points emerged from our analysis:

One is that we became interested in a certain very minimal type of game theory. There’s a type of called “the iterated prisoner’s dilemma” [that seems relevant here because] there are all these situations in which workers want to act, but they feel that they can’t act because they don’t



know if other workers will also take that step with them. They're too scared to act on their own, and also acting on your own wouldn't achieve anything. It would just land you in jail or cause you to lose your job. So there are problems of coordination that workers face in trying to struggle when they don't have organizations, or in things like riots or other forms of what are often called "spontaneous struggle," but we tried to interpret that as meaning *free* struggle. It's not a mechanical reaction. It's something that's unpredictable because it's grounded in human freedom and the fact that sometimes people can just decide to act. They often do so around triggering events like someone being killed or layoffs, but not every triggering event does that. [...] But what happens when people start to struggle under those conditions is that they learn to trust each other. The more people become involved in a struggle, the more other people feel it's safe to join, and the more they become willing to go further. So the development of new tactics, new forms of organization and new content is something that happens dynamically as people begin to trust each other more to participate.

The other big part of the article is this idea which comes from Gilles Dauvé, and from another long history of people thinking about communism within the ultra-left tradition, that it's precisely the forms of organization that workers build in order to carry out their struggles within capitalism that become *obstacles* to the revolutionary transformation of society. Once's struggles reach a certain point, the organizations that workers create to carry out their struggles undergo this process that we call *partisanization*, where the organization splits, with part of the membership trying to preserve the organization for the fight within the terms of capitalism, and another part trying to overturn capitalism and get to a new society. So we were trying to theorize how these struggles emerge in this new era, how they develop their own organizational forms, and then how at a high point of struggle, within the very organizations they form, there's a rupture.

#### ***Endnotes #5: The Passions and the Interests (2019)***

**T:** The pieces we're including from issue 5 are "Contours of the World Commune" and "To Abolish the Family," which were both intakes [articles by people who are not members of the editorial collective], so maybe you could just talk more generally about the issue. Why is it so different from the others?

**B:** There's a lot to say about that, but I'm not sure how to talk about it. One problem we were all facing was just that we were getting older and had to try to survive. There were a lot of career changes, illness and tragedy that slowed us down. That's one reason issue 5 ended up having a more intakes.

**J:** I could say something more general about the relationship between writing collectively and what we call “intakes.” Actually, that’s a word that comes from *Aufheben*. In *Aufheben* we would write most of the articles collectively, so *Endnotes*’ process of collective writing was part of the continuity with *Aufheben*. And then *Aufheben* would have these “intake” articles from sympathetic people we had reached out to, or who reached out to us. They weren’t part of the editorial group, but they were wanting to contribute to the project.

In *Endnotes* #5, Friends of the Classless Society are a group that we’ve known for a long time, probably since before we started *Endnotes*.<sup>19</sup> It’s always had a quality of being almost like a sister journal in German. We published several English translations of their work on our site, and they’ve translated our work into German. So it made sense for us to translate and publish this key summary of their long process of theoretical exploration, with a similar duration to *Endnotes* [i.e. the article “Contours of the World Commune”].

And then Michelle O’Brien’s “To Abolish the Family” builds on “The Logic of Gender,” continuing that conversation with a person who’s not in *Endnotes*, but is very sympathetic to the work we’ve done. And Michelle also drew heavily on “The History of Separation” to write that piece.

The other intakes in issue 5 also had a clear continuity, such as “Revolutionary Motives” by Jasper Bernes, which reflected discussions we’d had over the year, including his earlier piece we published [“Logistics, Counterlogistics and the Communist Prospect” from issue 3]. So these were all people who had been in conversation with *Endnotes*, sometimes over decades. [...]

**T:** Above you mentioned “We Unhappy Few,” one of the few collectively authored pieces from issue 5. Is there anything else you’d like to say about that here? Maybe in relation to [unpublished texts and discussions about] what it means to be a communist today, practically speaking.

**B:** [In both “We Unhappy Few” and some of our unpublished texts and discussions we’ve explored] the theory of lulls in struggles, the question of how you maintain yourself and continue to think about what we should do in periods like this, when [struggles aren’t cohering and revolution seems to be a very distant prospect at best]. [...] One of the piece’s main ideas is that struggles have to solve problems that haven’t been solved before. So when there’s a new struggle, that means there’s a potential for creativity to generate something new, including new tactics, new content, new forms of organization that can carry things to a higher level. And the problem of being a communist is that you’re formed by past eras of struggle, but then you’re trying to intervene in new ones. So there’s a creative art to being involved in new struggles and using your experience to participate in ways that might lead their dynamics to overflow

themselves. But there's always a danger that you learn the wrong lessons from the past and apply them to a present that's quite different, rendering your contributions ineffective or even harmful. So there's a whole theory of participation in struggle, but there's also an effort to get people to understand that the struggles of the future will happen on a much larger scale than the ones we've experienced before. And that instead of doing the one thing that you think might be the most important thing to get the struggle going, it's more important to contribute to an evolving ecosystem, where people actually do the things that they're good at, and that they enjoy doing, that they can do sustainably. So there's a bunch of messages in the text about what we call "limited militancy" rather than "unlimited militancy". Instead of seeing yourself as the leaders of the struggle, think about how you could actually contribute to it. [...]

**J:** At the same time some of us argued that we shouldn't be engaging with [activist] milieus in any respect, even if we're kind of therapeutically trying to work out bad ideas and thus in some sense doing good. There were reservations that people had about any level of engagement whatsoever with activist milieus and whether that should be Endnotes' job. I was one of the people who brought up those reservations. In some ways, that speaks to the very foundation of Endnotes. It's how we came out of an activist milieu and why we didn't want to go back: the desire to not be dragged into the kind of unhealthy dynamics that we talk about in "We Unhappy Few," that are often characteristic of anarchist circles but also activist circles in general. [...] Of course, we are never going to be uninvolved in struggles. But whether one can keep one's head has a lot to do with, in our view, whether one can avoid caught up in the sort of identities that spontaneously emerge in struggles [where petty power games are rarely far off]. [...] There's a whole politics about how one shouldn't didactically relate to people in struggle that we inherited from council communism and the way we understand the role of theory. [...]

**T:** Since we didn't include "We Unhappy Few" in the book, could you summarize it here?

**J:** "We Unhappy Few" was mainly written by one person [...], but probably one of the most significant members of Endnotes because he was also the main author of a lot of the Aufheben texts, so more than anyone else he represents the group's continuity with Aufheben. [...] It's a difficult text, reflecting on decades of discussion, but it brings out many of Endnotes' core themes, like how do we wish to relate to others engaged in struggle, and what does it mean to be engaged in struggle at all? It starts with the rupture with Aufheben precisely over those issues. [...] It's both an expression of actual experience and sort of meta reflection on it. Which is exactly what Open Marxism defined itself as: a refusal to do either applied theory or meta theory, but to do both at the same time. [...]

***"Onward Barbarians" (2020)***

**J:** “Onward Barbarians” has a similar form to “The Holding Pattern” in that it’s looking back over a recent wave of struggle. It was only a few months into the [covid] pandemic, but we were trying to emphasize just how much continuity there still was with the struggle that began after 2007. 2019 had been a high point internationally, including things like Hong Kong and the Gilets Jaunes and other major social movements around the world. France was basically experiencing a nonstop social uprising [from 2018 until March 2020, which resumed in September 2020 and especially took off with the pension reform strike in January 2023]. So we were trying to take stock of both those waves of struggle, arguing that the pandemic didn’t necessarily change the nature of those movements. There were still large uprisings emerging, including the general strike in India. Also across Latin America, including Chile and other countries, we were seeing continuity into the pandemic period. “Onward Barbarians” was thus partly an attempt to update “The Holding Pattern,” to show that we were still in the same cycle of struggles that we had described in “The Holding Pattern”. It hadn’t gone away. It was an accumulation of struggles that were still unfolding.

We also tried to draw a balance sheet, to extend that earlier analysis of the nature of those struggles. So we had some things to say about the parliamentary dimensions that we hadn’t discussed in “The Holding Pattern” because they hadn’t played out yet: the ways that those struggles had impacted parliamentary politics, especially in Europe, but also across the world, including Chile and other parts of Latin America. [...]

One of the other political questions that the article addressed was the pandemic response. It’s not like the response had simply crushed everything, because we weren’t seeing an end to these movements—except for a few cases such as Hong Kong, where the pandemic response actually did play a big role in crushing the movement. The response was instrumentalized for repressive ends, but it wasn’t entirely successful. It didn’t turn out to be the sort of Foucauldian, omniscient biopower that could just shut everything down entirely. Instead it turned out to be just one moment in a much longer conflict that gave some succor and power to capital and the state, but also provided a new basis for popular mobilization across the world.

So I think of “Onward Barbarians” as an attempt to step back from some of the poorly formulated, narrowly polarizing debates on the left, and just say “Things aren’t over! The world hasn’t ended.” The analysis from “The Holding Pattern” still has something to say, and we can build on it to make sense of this cycle of struggles, which we think of as really beginning in 2008 and continuing today. It was a way of producing a temporal periodization that could update “The Holding Pattern,” and then bring into that discussion new political forms that we hadn’t discussed before, such as populism of both left and right varieties, and the abolitionist politics

that were emerging in the American George Floyd Rebellion, and trying situate those within that wider arc.

**T:** How would you update that trajectory now in 2024?

**J:** That's a big and interesting question. [...] We would definitely emphasize the "more of the same" aspect. One of the innovations of "Onward Barbarians" is that we take up Asef Bayat's attempt to make sense of the Arab Spring, saying that this provides a useful framework for thinking about struggles during the pandemic. The concept of "non-movements" and the confusion they generate—the confusion of the reigning order, the constant disruption of the political terms of the pre-2008 era, the ways that "upstart" parties like Syriza and Podemos didn't last, right? [...] Because we're still living in this era of radical political instability, at the parliamentary level, which we argue is a reflection of the end of the balance of forces that had underpinned classical parliamentary politics, that long legacy of the labor movement in the parliament. So we've entered this era of confusion. That's the argument of "Onward Barbarians." It's a confusion in which no new political order has been found that can restabilize capitalist politics. And we argue that this is partly because no growth trajectory can be found that will stabilize growth.

So stagnation is the central economic concept of "Onward Barbarians." We draw on a bunch of work that we'd done in the past on stagnation<sup>20</sup> to clarify why this can help us make sense not only of the economy but also politics today. Stagnation is the best way of understanding our economic period. And confusion is the political expression of that fact. So every time there's a new government, people look to them to secure a growth trajectory out of this stagnation, and they always fail. And because they always fail, there's always a crumbling of that new order. It can never stabilize itself. So we've seen a lot of new left-wing governments emerge in places like Chile, Spain and Greece that crumble. Now [in 2024] I think we're in a moment where we're seeing a lot of new right-wing governments emerge, and our assumption is that they too will crumble, but there are open questions about what will happen in the process. We're not at all saying that a new order can't stabilize itself, or that we shouldn't worry about what will happen when the National Front win in France. It's a real problem for Europe, and for the world. [...] But the bigger bet is that the far right won't find a way to stabilize the confusion, because they can't offer the very thing that they're supposed to offer, that everyone does ultimately want from a political party that is supposedly going to help them: economic security through some kind of growth path. [...]

***What's Next?***

**T:** Maybe we could draw this interview to a close by talking about the plans for *Endnotes* #6? I had gotten the impression that *Endnotes* was over and there wouldn't be any more issues, but recently learned I was wrong.

**J:** It seems like a lot of people got that impression! I mean, it might not happen, and we might just end up doing a book series instead. But we definitely have plans for number 6. We want to write a long piece on demographic change, specifically the unpredictable ways that the dynamic of surplus populations could interact with declining demographic growth on a global scale, its ecological implications as well as its economic implications. Several of us have been doing work on that and want to publish something.

There's also a planned update to "Onward Barbarians" that we're always working on in different ways [...] And the authors of "The Logic of Gender" have some material for a new text, a kind of a reflection on that article and its reception.

Then we have this [Paul] Mattick stuff, part of which recently published [on the website [as a "dossier" titled *The Young Mattick: Early writings 1924-1934*]. We have a number of other translations of Mattick's writings, and Marie from the New Institute has written an excellent long piece on Mattick's early work. We are hoping to include that in a book of Mattick's writings.

The problem is that everyone's very scattered and caught up in other things, or they've become academics who have to publish in other venues under their own names. Not in all cases, but in many cases that's what's happened. There's a lot of pressure not to do *Endnotes* stuff. [...] There is a sense in which we're on hiatus because we'd like to expand and bring new people in, but it's always been difficult to do that, so we're still working on just consolidating the new membership that we've got. So the work of writing and publishing still seems just out of our immediate grasp, but here's also talk of this book series, which might be an alternative to issue 6.

**T:** What are these new collections of articles you're calling "dossiers"?

**J:** The first dossier was published in issue 5 on [Giorgio] Cesarano. We had the idea of having a section of the issue which was not written by us and not really in the same vein of conversation, but a supplement. We had a supplement on Cesarano's work, and we have more that we have yet to put on the website. But basically, the dossier was a section of the journal with a different color paper, and now we have three others: one on the George Floyd Rebellion, one on [Mario] Tronti, and one on [Paul] Mattick. So we just made it into a section of the website where these are kind of like mini-issues. If we publish an issue 6, at least one of them will go in as a supplement. The supplement on George Floyd was based on the idea that it was timely, because it was the two-year anniversary of the riots, and we already had a number of pieces, but we

didn't yet have issue 6 ready, so we thought we'd put the dossier online first, and then that just became a thing. We could just do dossiers whenever we wanted, so we published a bunch of translations of Tronti's work that were shared with us, and then we did the *Young Mattick* texts. We also just release a dossier on the Middle East which we plan to expand with several new translations from French and Arabic, including works by Mustapha Khayati, Michael Seurat, and Amadeo Bordiga.

**T:** Speaking of Mattick, earlier you mentioned council communism in relation to "We Unhappy Few." That's something that's pretty much unknown in China, so could you explain what that is and how it relates to Endnotes' perspective on activism and engagement with struggles?

**J:** Totally. I think the point at which most of us started thinking about how council communists engage in struggles was the early 2000s, when we [still in *Aufheben* at that time] were talking a lot with the [German] group Kolinko about the plan of doing worker inquiries. Some of us participated in the inquiry project in call centres that they had called for, and we engaged in discussions about the question "What is the inquiry?" Is its goal (1) to discover what's going on in a particular workplace and understand the relations in that workplace? Is it (2) to help other workers to understand what's going on in this particular workplace that they're not a part of? Or is it (3) for the people already in that workplace to start talking with activists who are doing the inquiry and start questioning things about their workplace, and about their relationship to other workers that might kick things off in that workplace? So there's roughly three versions of an inquiry that you could have. And the second one, where the function of the inquiry is to spread information about a particular workplace to other workers, is what we took to be the councilist approach.

**T:** The "mail carrier of the proletariat," right?

**J:** That isn't the way that many of the German council communists saw their organization. They were much more involved in practical interventions. But there was a tendency around Mattick, and around the Dutch councilists, to take a more radically anti-interventionist line in the late 1920s. And a key expression of that anti-interventionism was the text, "On the Impotence of Revolutionary Groups,"<sup>21</sup> which we draw on a lot in "We Unhappy Few," because we take it to be a truly original text that helps to clarify a whole approach that then runs through French councilism as well. So, for example, Henri Simon, *Echanges et Mouvement*, Cajo Brendel—all these tendencies that were involved in that discussion with Kolinko about the nature of the inquiry had this radically anti-interventionist position. And that was their critique: that Kolinko saw the inquiry as an intervention, that they saw the purpose of the inquiry as changing the minds of the people who were being inquired about. The argument that Henri Simon and others

made in those discussions was that this was not too far from Leninism in so far as it could be seen as a way to “bring consciousness to the proletariat” that was antithetical to this councilist tradition that had influenced our thinking.

[Later on, after Endnotes was formed,] our approach became more like “neither [version 2, “mail carrier”] nor [version 3 “interventionist”]”: Our position was more like version 1: well, it’s just good sociology, right? There’s no harm in it at all. You want to understand what’s going on in workplaces. Not necessarily by playing the “revolutionary postman,” you’re not necessarily going to be doing anything to change the limits that workers face in terms of organizing, but you are going to produce really good sociology. Of course, that was a bit of backhanded compliment to a group like Kolinko, who would hate to see themselves as sociologists. But to us, it wasn’t. We felt what they were doing was extremely useful. It’s not going to be the kind of intervention they might think it is, and the councilist version of the inquiry is going to only work in certain revolutionary situations. But it’s still worthwhile because it allows us to understand workplace dynamics in a way that most contemporary sociologists have failed to do.

The text where we made this argument was actually published in *Aufheben*. One of us wrote the article called “We Have Ways of Making You Talk,” which was a review of Kolinko’s book [*Hotlines: Call Centre, Inquiry, Communism*]<sup>22</sup> that was harshly critical, but also didn’t take this councilist line. It didn’t say, “the only function of the revolutionary is to connect workplaces.” That was Henri Simon’s position. We were in conversation with him, but from TC we were also developing a sense of the limits [of Simone’s councilism]. That conception of the activist as postman ends up becoming another kind of trap. In *We Unhappy Few* we explore Simone’s interesting distinction between the “spontaneous group,” the group that’s formed in the moment of struggle, and the “willed group.” The willed groups always exists. There’s always a group of revolutionaries who organize themselves. And the councilists put a lot of restrictions on what the willed group can and cannot do. We don’t think those restrictions are that essential. So we’re not defending the councilist anti-interventionist line, but we do think the councilists are right to point to the self-deception that is very common among willed groups. One name for that self-deception is Leninism, but you know, we’ve encountered many anarchist groups that are very capable of self-deceiving along similar lines. So it’s not unique to Leninism. It’s a very common feature of willed groups of revolutionaries, that they exaggerate their significance, imagine themselves to be doing a lot more than they’re doing, and seem unaware in many ways of where they’re actually coming from. [...]



**T:** When you distinguish yourselves from groups like Kolinko, which advocate that third, more interventionist approach to inquiries that Simone calls “Leninist,” would you call that a type of autonomist perspective?

**J:** Yes in the sense that it emerged out of a German version of autonomism the in the 1980s. And it’s worth noting that their vision of the revolutionary organization has proven very fruitful, and now [in a group partly descended from Kolinko called “Angry Workers”] they’re making lots of headway in bringing people on board and forming a new sort of international tendency that I’m very interested in and cautiously supportive of. We were quite critical of the particular vision of the inquiry that they had put forward, partly due to our own experience of trying to implement that vision, but I like to think we would be less critical if we were going write something today about their perspective.

**T:** How would you describe Endnotes’ perspective on this question of engagement with struggles? You’ve said there’s some disagreement among the members, but it sounds like everyone would agree that you’re not anti-interventionist, on the one hand, but on the other that you try to avoid illusions about the significance of whatever activism you might be engaged in?

**J:** I can point you to a quotation from *Théorie Communiste* that has come up a lot in our discussions of this question: “In the meantime, neither orphans of the labour movement, nor prophets of the communism to come, we participate in the class struggle as it is on a daily basis and as it produces theory.”<sup>23</sup> It’s almost become something of a motto for. It’s ambiguous, because it means we participate, but we don’t know what that participation is going to look like in advance. We don’t rule out anything. We don’t even rule out whatever Angry Workers want to do in terms of building the party. We’d only remind them of the twin dangers flagged by TC: the danger of taking ourselves to be prophets bringing a vital consciousness to the class and the danger of becoming orphans of dead organizational forms from which we endlessly derive the same useless lessons.

So those two conceptions—neither prophets nor orphans—cover a lot of what we think is problematic about the way the left relates to struggles, without limiting what we think is possible. We can participate in various ways, but recognizing that our participation is not the key to overcoming whatever limits the struggles present to themselves. And that the struggles themselves produce theory—that’s the last line, and that’s where it gets a bit meta-theoretical: that we are theorists because we care about theory, but we aren’t theorists in the sense that we don’t think of our theory as just bubbling up from inside us. We think that consciousness and theory is alive and real and exists between people—it exists in struggles and is produced by them, right? The way that the proletariat comes to understand itself in its struggles is the only

thing that matters in the end, and what we do in terms of writing things down and talking with other people is a very minor part of that, and will always necessarily be a very minor part of that.

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## Notes

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1. Quotation from “About Endnotes,” <endnotes.org.uk/pages/about>
  2. Quotation from “About *Aufheben*” (2006), <libcom.org/about2>
  3. The 1989-1990 movement against the poll tax has been described as “the biggest mass movement in British history, which at its peak involved over 17 million people.” For details see *Poll Tax Rebellion* by Danny Burns (Stirling, Scotland: AK Press, 1992). In 1989, Thatcher’s Conservative government had changed the traditional “domestic rates” system for funding local government through property-based taxes to a “poll tax” system where every adult had to pay basically the same rate, regardless of income. Many local groups emerged to protest the new system, coordinated through a nationwide federation. When the Labour Party refused to support acts of protest, the movement developed as an autonomous force, resulting in over 6,000 actions, including riots in several cities, and finally in the return to a property-based system similar to the old one. The movement also played a role in forcing Thatcher to resign as prime minister.
  4. Here the term “open” refers to open-ended and critical engagement with Marxist theory, in contrast with more rigid and dogmatic traditions. An influential collection of writings associated with this current was published in three volumes titled *Open Marxism* from Pluto Press in 1992 and 1995, edited by Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, John Holloway and Kosmas Psychopedis. (A fourth volume with more contributions from Latin America was published in 2019.) One way to define this broad tendency is proposed by the series blurb: “The aim of Open Marxism is to reconceptualise Marxism as a theory of struggle, rather than being an objective, constant analysis of capitalist domination as it is often understood.”
  5. “Auto Struggles: The Developing War Against the Road Monster,” *Aufheben* #3 (1994), <libcom.org/aufheben/aufheben-03>

6. “Reclaim the Streets (RTS) wanted to attack not just road-building but the way of life associated with it; RTS activists located this way of life as part of capital. They therefore came to support workplace struggles against capital, such as the strikes by the signal workers and tube drivers.” From *Aufheben*’s 1994 pamphlet “The politics of anti-road struggle and the struggles of anti-road politics: the case of the No M11 link road campaign,” republished in George McKay (ed.), *DiY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain* (London: Verso, 1998). In the same book, also see John Jordan, “The art of necessity: the subversive imagination of anti-road protest and Reclaim the Streets.”
7. According to *Aufheben*’s analysis in 1998, the Labour Party’s “Welfare to Work” program under Prime Minister Tony Blair (who sought to make neoliberalism more palatable to the working class than did his predecessor Thatcher) constituted “an attack not just on the conditions of the unemployed but also, through the job substitution and increased labour-market competition it will result in, on wage levels.” The program was also “part of a crusade to re-impose the work ethic. It is the government’s flagship policy and is central to ‘reforming’ the very principles of the welfare state.” From their 1999 pamphlet *Dole autonomy versus the re-imposition of work*, which also reports critically on the struggles against this program up to that point. <[libcom.org/library/dole-autonomy-versus-re-imposition-work](http://libcom.org/library/dole-autonomy-versus-re-imposition-work)>
8. “We Unhappy Few,” *Endnotes* #5 (2019): <[endnotes.org.uk/issues/5](http://endnotes.org.uk/issues/5)>
9. An English translation of TC’s critique was published in *Aufheben* #11 (2003) as “Intakes: Communist Theory—Beyond the Ultra-left,” along with background on TC’s theoretical positions ([libcom.org/library/beyond-ultra-left-aufheben-11](http://libcom.org/library/beyond-ultra-left-aufheben-11)). *Aufheben*’s response and TC’s rejoinders were published in issues 12 (2004) and 13 (2005). The exchange concludes, “Originally we had planned to publish a short introduction to TC’s response that would seek to respond in turn to the issues they raise, in particular the ‘ad hominem’ point at the end; but we were unable to come to an agreement. On top of this, some of us feel that we don’t have enough translated material to understand how the specific theoretical positions cohere within TC’s theory as a whole and how the abstract formulations with which they present their positions are theoretically grounded or result from detailed particular analyses.” This marks the beginning of *Endnotes*, as discussed below.
10. “Programmatism” is one of TC’s key concepts of historical periodization, which they define as “as a theory and practice of class struggle in which the proletariat finds, in its drive toward liberation, the fundamental elements of a future social organisation which

become *the programme to be realised*. This revolution is thus the *affirmation of the proletariat*, whether as a dictatorship of the proletariat, workers' councils, the liberation of work, a period of transition, the withering of the state, generalised self-management, or a 'society of associated producers'. Programmatism is not simply a theory — it is above all the practice of the proletariat, in which *the rising strength of the class* (in unions and parliaments, organisationally, in terms of the relations of social forces or of a certain level of consciousness regarding 'the lessons of history') *is positively conceived of as a stepping-stone* toward revolution and communism. Programmatism is intrinsically linked to the contradiction between the proletariat and capital as it is constituted by the *formal* subsumption of labour under capital." According to TC, the period of programmatism ended in the 1970s, after capital's *real* subsumption of labor became so complete that the proletariat no longer had any positive essence that could be affirmed in the form of a revolutionary program to be implemented after the seizure of power. Instead, now communist revolution can only be conceived as the proletariat's collective self-negation of its being as a class. Quotation from "Much Ado about Nothing" by *Théorie Communiste* in *Endnotes* #1 (2008), <endnotes.org.uk/issues/1>.

11. "An Identical Object-Subject?" *Endnotes* #4 (2015), <endnotes.org.uk/issues/4>
12. "Picket and Pot Banger Together: Class recomposition in Argentina?" from *Aufheben* #11 (2003), <libcom.org/aufheben/aufheben-11>; Roland Simon (of TC), "Self-organisation is the first act of the revolution; it then becomes an obstacle which the revolution has to overcome," *Revue Internationale pour la Communisation* (2005), <libcom.org/article/self-organisation-first-act-revolution-it-then-becomes-obstacle-which-revolution-has>
13. "Two Aspects of Austerity" by Bar-Yuchnei (2011), <endnotes.org.uk/posts/endnotes-two-aspects-of-austerity>
14. For example, see "Distinction de genres, programmatisme et communisation" by Roland Simon and its two appendices from *Théorie Communiste* #23 (2010), translated into English for a 2011 pamphlet from Pétroleuse Press titled '*Gender-Class-Dynamic*' and '*Comrades, but Women*'. These three texts are available in English on the Libcom archive: <libcom.org/article/gender-distinction-programmatism-and-communisation-roland-simon>

15. This debate is summarized in “The Gender Distinction in Communisation Theory” by P. Valentine, *Lies* #1 (2012), < [liesjournal.net/volume1-12-genderdistinction.html](http://liesjournal.net/volume1-12-genderdistinction.html)>. See below for more on the question of contradiction.
16. That 1978 article was later published in a collection of Mattick’s writings edited by his son, Paul Mattick Jr., titled *Marxism: Last Refuge of the Bourgeoisie?* (Routledge, 2013).
17. ‘For us, it makes no more sense to speak of a contradiction between workers and capital than it does to speak of one between men and women. In fact, the only “contradiction between” is the one with which Marx begins volume one of *Capital*, namely, the contradiction between use value and exchange value. [...] The economy is thus a social activity that is based on a *logical* contradiction, which unfolds, in time, as unfreedom, as a practical impossibility for human beings to be what they must be.’ This editorial to issue 3 then notes, ‘The notion of a “contradiction between classes” appears to be of strictly Maoist lineage.’ In one case translated into English as “contradiction,” the German term was actually *Gegensatz* (opposition) rather than *Widerspruch* (contradiction).’ Editorial to *Endnotes* #3, 2013, <[endnotes.org.uk/issues/3](http://endnotes.org.uk/issues/3)>
18. “The Moving Contradiction: The Systematic Dialectic of Capital as a Dialectic of Class Struggle,” *Endnotes* #2 (2010), <[endnotes.org.uk/articles/the-moving-contradiction](http://endnotes.org.uk/articles/the-moving-contradiction)>
19. Friends of the Classless Society is a group based in Berlin that collaborates with several other anti-authoritarian communist groups to publish the German-language journal *Kosmoprolet*, founded in 2007. According to their self-description, *Kosmoprolet* “is not committed to any specific tradition, but draws its historical influences from dissident parts of the communist left and the radical movements that have set autonomy against state worship and party fetishism.” The journal “aims at the self-abolition of the proletariat. Neither trade unions nor leftist governments, but only the wage earners themselves can free themselves from their misery by collectively seizing the means of production and fundamentally transforming them to create a world without wage labor and state, exploitation, and domination. This necessarily includes the revolutionization of housework, childcare, and other areas predominantly assigned to women.” <[kosmoprolet.org/de/ueber-uns](http://kosmoprolet.org/de/ueber-uns)>
20. This past work on stagnation refers to “Misery and Debt” and “The Holding Pattern” (both included in this book), in addition to “Two Aspects of Austerity” and the editorials to several of the journal issues.

21. By Sam Moss, first published in *Living Marxism* vol. 4 no. 7 (1939), available online here:  
<[cominsitu.wordpress.com/2020/10/06/on-the-impotence-of-revolutionary-groups-moss-1939](https://cominsitu.wordpress.com/2020/10/06/on-the-impotence-of-revolutionary-groups-moss-1939)>
22. The English version of Kolinko's 2002 book *Hotlines* is available here:  
<[libcom.org/article/hotlines-call-centre-inquiry-communism](https://libcom.org/article/hotlines-call-centre-inquiry-communism)>. "We Have Ways of Making You Talk" was published in *Aufheben* #12 (2004), <[libcom.org/library/we-have-ways-making-you-talk](https://libcom.org/library/we-have-ways-making-you-talk)>
23. Translated in "Intakes: Communist Theory—Beyond the Ultra-left" from *Aufheben* #11 (2003), <[libcom.org/library/beyond-ultra-left-aufheben-11](https://libcom.org/library/beyond-ultra-left-aufheben-11)>